

**Amendments to the Claims**

1. (Original) A tool for installing a first piece of siding over a previously-installed, second piece of siding in an overlapping relationship, the tool comprising:

an elongate longitudinal member comprising top and bottom end portions;

a top siding-engaging member extending from the top end for engaging a top transverse edge of the first piece of siding; and

a bottom siding-engaging member extending generally from the bottom end portion for engaging a bottom transverse edge of the first piece of siding, the top and bottom siding-engaging member being spaced apart from each other a fixed distance such that, whenever the first piece of siding is disposed between the top and bottom siding-engaging members, the top and bottom siding-engaging members frictionally engage the top and bottom transverse edges, respectively, of the first piece of siding to retain the tool on the first piece of siding.

2. (Original) The tool of claim 1, wherein the top and bottom siding-engaging members are configured to engage an end portion of the first piece of siding such that the longitudinal member is juxtaposed to an end edge of the first piece of siding whenever the first piece of siding is disposed between the top and bottom siding-engaging members.

3. (Original) The tool of claim 2, wherein the longitudinal member has a thickness dimensioned to establish a predetermined end gap at the end edge of the first piece of siding.

4. (Original) The tool of claim 1, further comprising at least one siding-support member extending from the longitudinal member and disposed between the top and bottom siding-engaging members, the siding-support member being configured to support the first piece of siding above the second piece of siding in an overlapping manner.

5. (Original) The tool of claim 4, wherein:  
the top and bottom siding-engaging members are configured to engage an end portion of the first piece of siding such that the longitudinal member is juxtaposed to an end edge of the first piece of siding; and

the at least one siding-support member comprises first and second siding-support members configured such that the first siding-support member supports the first piece of siding above the second piece of siding when the tool is installed on a first end portion of the first piece of siding, and the second siding-support member supports the first piece of siding above the second piece of siding when the tool is installed on a second end portion of the first piece of siding.

6. (Original) The tool of claim 4, wherein the at least one siding-support member is longitudinally spaced from the bottom siding-engaging member a distance approximately defining the overlap between the first piece of siding and the second piece of siding.

7. (Previously Presented) The tool of claim 2, wherein said end portion comprises a first end portion and the bottom siding-engaging member comprises first and second siding-engaging surfaces configured such that the first siding-engaging surface engages a bottom transverse edge of the first piece of siding when the tool is installed on the first end portion of the first piece of siding and the second siding-engaging surface engages a bottom transverse edge of the first piece of siding when the tool is installed on a second end portion of the first piece of siding.

8. (Original) The tool of claim 4, wherein the at least one siding-support member is spaced laterally from the bottom siding-engaging member a distance approximately greater than the thickness of the first piece of siding to permit removal of the tool from the first piece of siding after the first piece of siding is secured to a structure.

9. (Original) The tool of claim 1, further comprising a first gauge surface and a second gauge surface spaced from the first gauge surface a distance approximately equal to the exposure of the second piece of siding, the first gauge being adapted to abut the bottom transverse edge of the first piece of siding and the second gauge surface being adapted to abut a bottom transverse edge of the second piece of siding.

10. (Original) The tool of claim 4, wherein:

the at least one siding-support member has an upper and lower surface, the lower surface being longitudinally spaced from the bottom siding-engaging member a distance equal to a desired overlap between the first piece of siding and the second piece of siding; and

the top siding-engaging member has an upper surface, the upper surface of the siding-support member being longitudinally spaced from the upper surface of the top siding-engaging member a distance equal to a desired exposure of the second piece of siding.

11. (Currently Amended) A tool for installing siding, the tool comprising non-movable, first and second siding-engaging portions being at fixed, non-adjustable locations with respect to each other, the tool being adapted to couple to an end portion of a piece of siding by engaging sliding the first and second siding-engaging portions onto first and second transverse edges of the piece of siding and such that a surface of the tool is juxtaposed to an a vertical end edge surface of the end portion.

12. (Currently Amended) The tool of claim 11 comprising an elongate body, ~~and the~~ first and second siding-engaging portions extending from the body, the second siding-engaging portion being spaced from the first siding-engaging portion such that the first siding-engaging portion frictionally engages the first transverse edge of the piece of siding and the second siding-engaging portion frictionally engages the second transverse edge of the piece of siding to retain the tool on the end portion of the piece of siding.

13. (Currently Amended) A tool for installing siding, the tool being adapted to couple to an end portion of a piece of siding by engaging first and second transverse edges of the piece of siding and such that a surface of the tool is juxtaposed to an end edge of the end portion ~~The tool of claim 11,~~ wherein the tool creates an end gap between the end edge of the piece of siding and an adjacent surface on the structure when the tool is installed on the end portion and the piece of siding is secured to a structure.

14. (Original) The tool of claim 13, wherein the tool has a thickness that approximately defines the width of the end gap.

15. (Previously Presented) The tool of claim 11 comprising a siding-support portion for supporting the piece of siding above a previously-installed piece of siding in a lower course in an overlapping manner.

16. (Canceled)

17. (Currently Amended) A tool for installing a piece of siding having first and second end portions, the tool comprising:

~~The tool of claim 16, further comprising an elongate body having first and second end portions, and an extension portion extending from the body, the first and second siding-engaging surfaces extending from opposite sides of the extension portion~~ first end portion, the first and second siding engaging surfaces being non-parallel to each other and non-perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of the body; and

wherein when the tool is installed on the first end portion, the first siding-engaging surface frictionally engages a transverse edge of the first end portion, and when the tool is installed on the second end portion, the second siding-engaging surface frictionally engages a transverse edge of the second end portion; and

18. (Currently Amended) A tool for installing siding that has first and second opposing end portions, the tool being adapted to couple to an end portion of a piece of siding such that a surface of the tool is juxtaposed to an end edge of the end portion, the tool comprising:

a first siding-engaging surface and a second siding-engaging surface, wherein when the tool is installed on the first end portion, the first siding-engaging surface frictionally engages a transverse edge of the first end portion, and when the tool is installed on the second end portion, the second siding-engaging surface frictionally engages a transverse edge of the second end portion; and

~~The tool of claim 16, further comprising a first siding-support portion and a second siding-support portion, the first siding-support portion being configured to support the first end portion of the piece of siding above a previously-installed piece of siding when the tool is installed on the first end portion, the second siding-support portion being configured to support~~

the second end portion of the piece of siding above a previously-installed piece of siding when the tool is installed on the second end portion.

19. (Original) The tool of claim 18, wherein the first siding-support portion is laterally spaced from the first siding-engaging surface a predetermined distance, and the second siding-support portion is laterally spaced from the second siding-engaging surface by said predetermined distance.

20. (Original) The tool of claim 18, wherein the tool is generally symmetrical with respect to a line extending longitudinally through the tool, wherein the first siding-support portion and the first siding-engaging surface are on the one side of the line, and the second siding-support portion and the second siding-engaging surface are on the opposite side of the line.

21. (Previously Presented) A tool for installing horizontally-disposed, overlapping siding on a structure, the tool comprising a body configured to couple to an end portion of a piece of siding to be installed, the body having an inner surface extending the majority of the height of the piece of siding, such that when the tool is coupled to the end portion, the inner surface contacts an end edge of the end portion and when the piece of siding is placed against the structure and the body is positioned between the end portion and a horizontally adjacent surface on the structure, a gap is created between the end portion and the adjacent surface.

22. (Previously Presented) The tool of claim 21, wherein the body comprises an elongate longitudinal portion defining the inner surface and being juxtaposed to an end edge of the end portion when the tool is installed on the end portion of the piece of siding, the longitudinal portion having a thickness that approximately defines a width of the gap when the piece of siding is installed on the structure.

23. (Previously Presented) A tool for installing horizontally-disposed, overlapping siding on a structure, the tool comprising a body configured to couple to an end portion of a piece of siding to be installed such that when the piece of siding is placed against the structure

and the body is positioned between the end portion and a horizontally adjacent surface on the structure, a gap is created between the end portion and the adjacent surface, wherein the body comprises:

- a top end portion and a bottom end portion;
- a top siding-engaging member extending from the top end portion of the body for engaging a top transverse edge of the end portion of the piece of siding; and
- a bottom siding-engaging member extending from the bottom end portion of the body for engaging a bottom transverse edge of the end portion of the piece of siding, the top and bottom siding-engaging member being spaced apart from each other such that the top and bottom siding-engaging members frictionally engage the top and bottom transverse edges, respectively, of the end portion of the piece of siding to retain the tool on the piece of siding.

24. (Original) The tool of claim 21, further comprising at least one siding-support portion extending from the body, the siding-support portion being configured to support the piece of siding to be installed above a previously-installed piece of siding.

25. (Original) A method for installing horizontally-disposed, overlapping siding on a structure, the method comprising:

- coupling a siding-installation tool to a first piece of siding that is to be installed on the structure, the tool engaging top and bottom transverse edges of the first piece of siding; and
- supporting the tool on a second piece of siding that has been previously installed on the structure such that the first piece of siding is supported in an overlapping relationship with the second piece of siding.

26. (Previously Presented) A method for installing horizontally-disposed, overlapping siding on a structure, the method comprising:

- securing a siding-installation tool to an end portion of a first piece of siding that is to be installed on the structure, the tool being completely removable from the first piece of siding; and
- positioning the first piece of siding against the structure such that the tool abuts an adjacent surface on the structure, thereby creating an end gap between the end portion of the first piece of siding and the adjacent surface; and

supporting the tool on a previously installed, second piece of siding when creating the end gap such that the first piece of siding is supported in an overlapping relationship with the second piece of siding.

27. (Original) A tool for installing a piece of siding on a structure, the piece of siding having first and second end portions, the tool comprising:

an elongate longitudinal portion having top and bottom end portions;

a top siding-engaging portion extending from the top portion of the longitudinal portion;

and

a bottom siding-engaging portion comprising a leg portion extending from the bottom portion of the longitudinal member and first and second siding-engaging surfaces extending from opposing sides of the leg portion;

wherein the tool is adapted to receive the first end portion of the piece of siding between the top siding-engaging portion and the first siding-engaging surface with the longitudinal portion juxtaposed to an end edge of the first end portion of the piece of siding, and to receive the second end portion of the piece of siding between the top siding-engaging portion and the second siding-engaging surface with the longitudinal portion juxtaposed to an end edge of the second end portion of the piece of siding.

28. (Original) A tool for installing a first piece of siding above a previously-installed, second piece of siding on a structure, the first piece of siding having first and second end portions, the tool comprising:

an elongate longitudinal portion having top and bottom end portions;

a top siding-engaging portion extending from the top portion of the longitudinal portion, the top siding-engaging portion comprising first and second siding-engaging surfaces extending at an angle with respect to each other;

a bottom siding-engaging portion comprising a leg portion extending from the bottom portion of the longitudinal portion and first and second siding-engaging surfaces extending from opposing sides of the leg portion, the first and second siding-engaging surfaces of the bottom siding-engaging portion extending at an angle with respect to each other;

wherein the first siding-engaging surfaces of the top and bottom siding-engaging portions

are configured to frictionally engage top and bottom transverse edges of the first end portion of the first piece of siding to retain the tool on the first end portion as the first piece of siding is being installed, and the second siding-engaging surfaces of the top and bottom siding-engaging portions are configured to frictionally engage top and bottom transverse edges of the second end portion of the first piece of siding to retain the tool on the second end portion as the first piece of siding is being installed;

first and second siding-support portions extending from opposite sides of the longitudinal portion between the top and bottom end portions of the longitudinal portion, the first siding-support portion configured to support the first piece of siding above the second piece of siding when the tool is retained on the first end portion of the first piece of siding, the second siding-support portion configured to support the first piece of siding above the second piece of siding when the tool is retained on the second end portion of the first piece of siding; and

a first gauge surface and a second gauge surface spaced from the first gauge surface a distance approximately equal to the exposure of the second piece of siding, the first gauge being adapted to abut a bottom transverse edge of the first piece of siding and the second gauge surface being adapted to abut a bottom transverse edge of the second piece of siding.